

AMHERST REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
MINUTES
August 25, 2010

LOCATION: First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall

MEMBERS PRESENT: John Coull, Lawrence Kelley, Margaret Roberts. Members Aaron Hayden and Jeanne Traester were absent.

OTHERS PRESENT: Joan Burgess, John Fox, Seymour Friedman, Barbara Pearson, Tony Maroulis, Elissa Rubinstein, Walter Wolnik

STAFF PRESENT: Jonathan Tucker (Planning Director)

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m.

Announcements – None.

Executive Session – None.

Minutes

The Authority reviewed and approved minutes from its meetings of June 23, July 14 and 28.

Old Business

a. **Working Session - Review of draft RFP for Gateway District**

Mrs. Roberts has a series of questions. She asked whether the project goals should be more fully described. In particular, she thought that its mixed use nature should be emphasized.

On page 2, under the description of the area, she noted that the Authority did not yet know the size of the area to be included in the project. Mr. Tucker replied that such language would be added, and noted that part of consultant's job would be to help the community decide the project's size and scope.

On page 3, Mrs. Roberts wanted to know if the consultant would attend the review of the draft recommendations. Mr. Tucker said that they would.

Mr. Kelley said he liked the RFP as written.

With regard to the zoning bylaw and map amendments, Mrs. Roberts asked if form-based code could allow for transition areas. Mr. Tucker said that the Authority could ask that they be.

Mrs. Roberts asked about UMass' involvement. Mr. Tucker noted that they would be part of the public process. Mrs. Roberts said that the Town/Commercial Relations Committee, Finance Committee and Joint Capital Planning Committee should also be involved.

Mrs. Roberts recommended changing the consultant requirements from a minimum of 5 years experience to "a minimum of 3 years experience with form based zoning." She recommended also that experience with academic communities be included as a requirement and that "mixed use" be added to the language of the legal

ad requesting proposals.

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b. Site Visit – Storrs, CT

The upcoming September 16 site visit to Mansfield (Storrs), CT was discussed. It was agreed that the visit would follow the same format as the Hanover visit—a meeting with local officials and a visit of the development site. Further details would be announced as the date approached.

New Business

a. Joint Meeting with Planning Board

It was agreed to pursue a September 29 joint meeting with the Planning Board, and that the meeting would involve a general introduction of the Gateway project and an invitation for further communication.

Mrs. Roberts said the Authority needed to plan on how it would explain "form based zoning" to town meeting members. Mr. Tucker said that such an explanation would be needed, and that the urban form study prepared by the Master Plan consultants would be useful in illustrating how form-based code worked. Mr. Coull suggested general public forums.

Public Questions & Comments

Walter Wolnik noted that the term "floating zones" was still in the new draft RFP. He pointed out that the Select Board publishes documents in advance in its packet so that members of the public could follow along, and put those documents on the website. Mr. Tucker replied that the Select Board had dedicated staff who only worked on Select Board issues. Planning Department staff support many Town boards and committees. He couldn't promise that documents would be available in advance of meetings. Sometimes they were only completed the day of the meeting. Mr. Coull said the Authority understood the work load and did not expect anything different.

Joan Burgess requested timely completion of ARA minutes, and handed out a memo outlining her perspectives on several issues.

John Fox said that the draft RFP only referred to the properties along North Pleasant Street. Mr. Tucker replied that, as Mr. Roberts had pointed out, the consultant will know that helping to determine the scope of the project would be part of their responsibility.

Elissa Rubinstein recommended some additions to the document describing lessons from the Hanover site visit. These included investing an appropriate amount of time in public process, carefully considering the impact of student housing (esp., undergraduate housing), discouraging the establishment of bars, including office uses, and not expecting any benefits to retail operations as a result of the presence of students.

Mr. Fox asked for reassurance that the RFP was not going to be "lined" to a given consultant. Mr. Tucker said it was required to be an open public process.

Mr. Fox handed out a memo he had prepared in the form of a legal review of the applicability of the urban renewal criteria to the Gateway area. He expressed concern with any use of the terms blighted or decadent. Mr.

Tucker said that these were terms of art, and that under other criteria stated in the enabling legislation, they were usually interpreted to mean that an area was "underutilized." Mr. Fox questioned whether there was any substandard housing in the area.

Mr. Fox said that if a purpose of the project was neighborhood stabilization, then undergraduate housing should be removed as a potential use.

Seymour Friedman pointed out that changes in UMass policy now allowed sophomores to live off-campus. He said he did not believe that UMass would turn the former fraternity property over to the Town if the project only included housing for grad students and faculty. Mr. Tucker responded that without undertaking active change, things would only get worse. This project represented an opportunity to better address off-campus student housing issues.

There was further discussion.

Mrs. Roberts urged the neighbors to understand that the Authority and the Town were not pursuing the Gateway project in order to "lay something awful on your neighborhood."

Upon a motion from Mr. Kelley and a second from Mrs. Roberts, the Authority voted unanimously (3-0) to adjourn at 8:59 p.m.